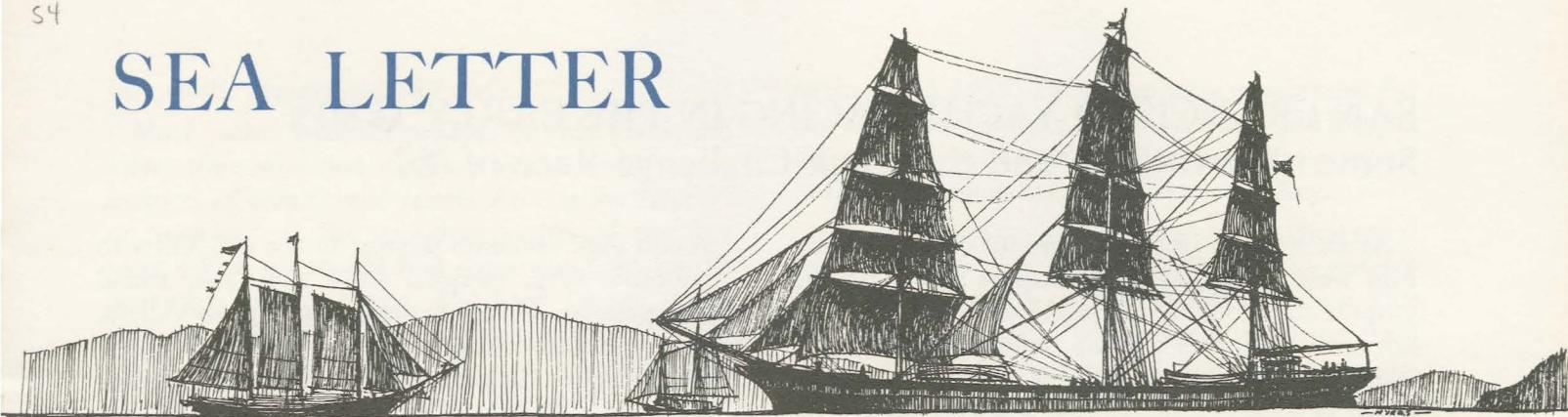


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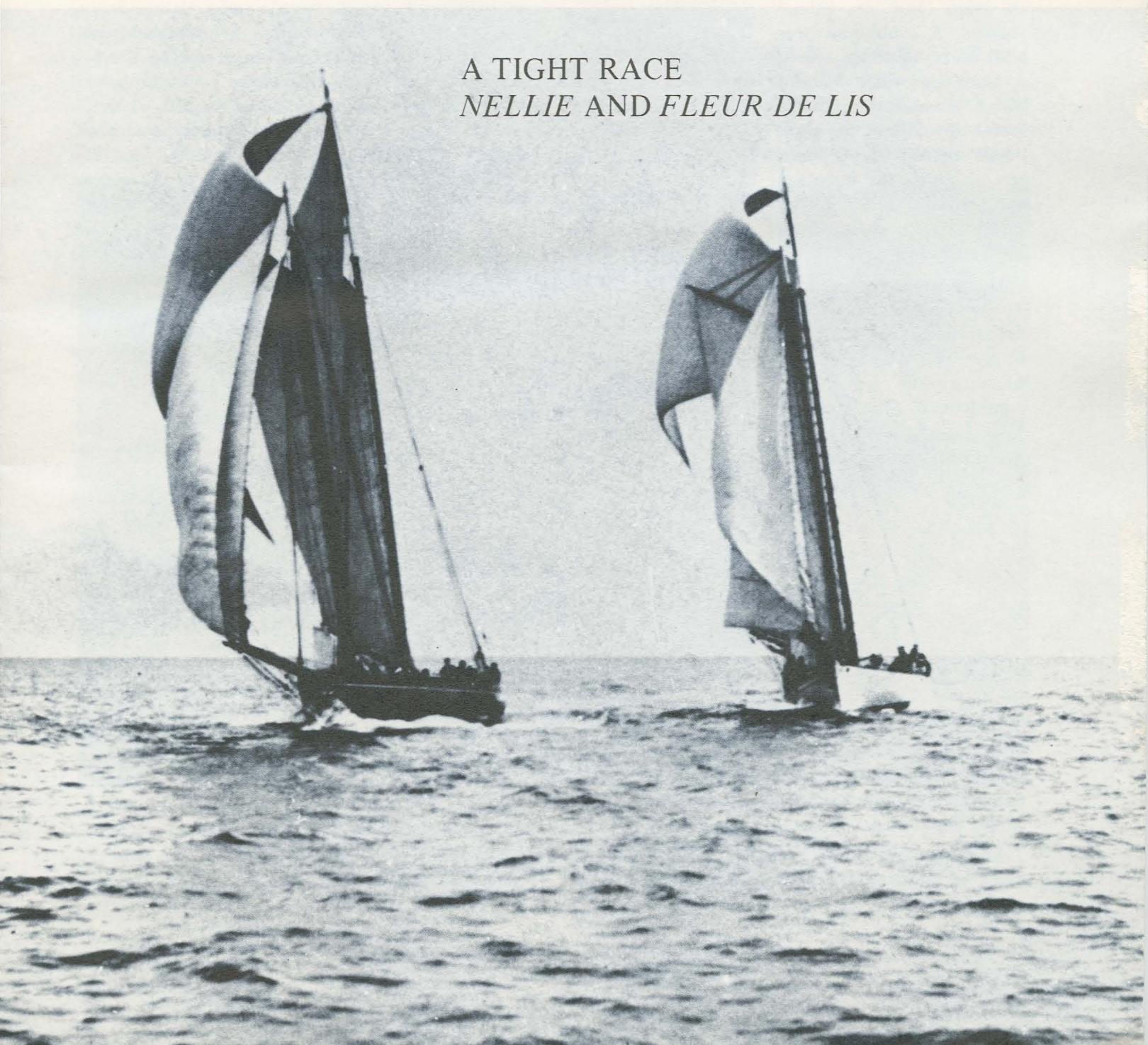
# SEA LETTER



OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MARITIME MUSEUM

Winter/Spring  
1976

## A TIGHT RACE *NELLIE AND FLEUR DE LIS*



# SAN FRANCISCO YACHT RACING IN THE EARLY 1880's

## Some observations, and the Great Challenge Race of '82

As far back as 1852 small groups of San Franciscans were being formed to acquire a boat for the purpose of daysailing or cruising on the Bay. It was not until 1869 that a group representing the ownership of several boats formed what we think of today as a yacht club. In that year, the owners of seven or eight boats started the San Francisco Yacht Club with the express purpose of holding a cruise to Napa and an annual regatta. A clubhouse was built on Long Bridge, which spanned now-filled Mission Bay. Financial problems forced the sale of the clubhouse several years later, and although the members reorganized in 1873, no regattas were held from 1872 to 1876.

The centennial year evidently revived interest in yacht racing, and an influx of members, plus a sounder financial status, lent enough confidence for the consideration of a new clubhouse. Sausalito, with its protected waters seemed ideal, but a sharp difference in opinion over exact location led owners of most of the larger yachts to split off and form the Pacific Yacht Club. The San Francisco Yacht Club constructed its modest

quarters on the spot of what is now Ondine's Restaurant, while the Pacific Yacht Club built a more elaborate structure at "Old Sausalito", or what is now known as "Hurricane Gulch." Members of both clubs continued to keep their boats in San Francisco, either at Mission Bay or in the Front Street Wharf area.

The members of the clubs were primarily interested in outings, cruising, and the social life built

around their common interest in the sea. Visits to California City, Hospital Cove and Goat Island were popular, and more ambitious trips to Vallejo, Napa and Antioch were well attended. On these longer cruises, broadsides were printed, detailing the order of sailing and the signals to be used for anchoring, weighing anchor and getting under way.

On all these trips a keen interest was displayed in the speed and relative sailing merits of each yacht, and from its inception the San Francisco Yacht Club held an annual regatta to determine the club champion. While it appears that the yachts sailed to the various cruise destinations in some semblance of order, on the return they often tested their speed against each other; and these informal "brushes" were duly reported in the newspapers of the day. Many of the newspapers had a "yachting correspondent" who not only gave news of the cruises and their informal tests of speed, and the formal regattas which became more numerous in the late 70's, but also duly reported changes of yacht ownership, new boats being built and club news of a general nature.

San Francisco Yacht Club.

OPENING TRIP, SEASON OF 1882, }  
GENERAL ORDERS NO. 1.

Club yachts will assemble at Saucelito prior to 1 P. M., Saturday, April 29th, and will anchor as near the Club House as convenient.

At 2 P. M., all yachts will "dress ship."

At 5.50 P. M., a gun will fire from the flag-ship, when yachts will "undress."

At 6.05 P. M., the preparatory gun will fire, and five minutes later, the starting gun, when all yachts will get under weigh, and proceed to Mare Island, anchoring close in on the Navy Yard side, and just above the ferry.

At 11 A. M. on Sunday, the preparatory gun will fire, and five minutes later the starting gun, when yachts will get under way and "try rate of sailing" to San Francisco, passing to the westward of Blossom Rock buoy.

Yachts are requested to observe colors at the 8 A. M. and sunset guns, and also to look for and answer signals from the flag-ship.

Visiting yachts are requested to comply with these orders.

By order of the Commodore.

A. B. Underhill, Jr.,  
Secretary.

SAN FRANCISCO, April 17th, 1882.

Yachts of the two clubs were generally over 40 feet in length and no yacht could be officially carried on the club's rolls, with the attendant right to fly the club's burgee, unless she was a minimum of 20 feet on the waterline. Small boat racing was introduced in 1882 with a "Mosquito Regatta" for all comers, yacht club affiliation not necessary, and its popularity was instantaneous. Up to that year yacht racing and yacht clubs were strictly the prov-

ince of the owners of larger craft.

Most yachts were the product of local yards, and many were modelled and built by the most famous builders of commercial vessels. Among the "flyers" or "cracks," as the speediest yachts of the day were called, one could find schooners built by the boatyards of W. Stone, Matthew Turner, Jehre Nichols and W. G. Hall of the famous Hall Brothers of Port Ludlow, Washington, men who had years of experience in constructing commercial offshore craft that would stand up to the strong winds of the Pacific North Coast.

Occasionally, though, a prospective owner looking for a way to acquire a sure winner would import a boat from the East Coast. It was in this way that the sloops *Clara* and *Annie* arrived on the scene, both to begin long and successful racing careers. *Annie*, modeled by the famous Robert Fish — considered by many the equal of George Steers, builder of *America* — had an active career

lasting until 1935. These two were exceptions. Far too often the imports, broad of beam and lofty in rig, were too tender and over-canvassed to compete in the lusty westerlies of San Francisco Bay.

San Francisco yachtsmen were avid in their quest for speed, and speed on San Francisco Bay generally meant the ability to carry canvas in a blow. This essential requirement, which benefitted little from the then current concepts of American yacht design, made local yachtsmen attentive followers of the great controversy that was being waged in Eastern yachting circles over the relative merits of two distinct theories of modelling yachts: the American or "skimming dish" principal versus the English deep keel.

The "skimming dish" or "pumpkin seed" proponents favored the broadbeamed, shallow draft and heavily canvassed centerboarders which had evolved in the sheltered waters and shoal harbors of New York and New Jersey. The measurement



Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

San Francisco Yacht Club in the early 80's with *Chispa* tied alongside. The club is on the site of present-day Ondine's Restaurant and the small row of houses to the right still exists, albeit with far more gingerbread decor today than in their original state.



Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Annie reaching toward Alcatraz. Although east coast modeller Robert Fish used beam for stability, Annie was more successful in San Francisco yacht racing than most imports.

rules for establishing racing handicaps that were then in force encouraged these characteristics, and in smooth protected waters and light to medium air these yachts were undeniably fast. In the windy, choppy water of San Francisco Bay these same characteristics produced a tender craft that could be alarmingly unstable, despite generous inside ballast. The deep keel adherents, spearheaded by the editor of *Forest and Stream*, the leading American yachting journal of the day, favored a shift toward the English design principal which had developed an exceedingly narrow, very deep, cutter rigged model. The year 1882 was to provide dramatic evidence of the validity of the English school of thought when the little Scottish cutter *Madge* spent a summer racing on the Eastern Seaboard. *Madge* confounded the "skimming dish" adherents, and thoroughly trounced her American competition, losing but one race.

Argued hotly in the East, closely followed in the West, the Great Debate had really been decided for San Francisco yachtsmen during the preceding three years. Two innovations, empirically derived from several seasons of "brushes" and formal regattas, were gaining acceptance among the more observant yachtsman. The use of the leg o'mutton mainsail, and the use of outside ballast or the "lead plaster" keel, produced yachts that were generally among the front runners in any race. And although neither idea was new, their acceptance on San Francisco Bay was in large measure the result of the sharp eye and innovative judgement of that master builder of commercial vessels, Matthew Turner, an enthusiastic member and past Vice Commodore of the San Francisco Yacht Club.

In advocating use of the leg o'mutton main for yachts, Turner had successful precedent in the sloop *Emerald*, winner of the first two annual San Francisco Yacht Club regattas, in 1869 and 1870, the first two yacht races held on San Francisco Bay. Throughout the 70's an occasional yacht could be seen carrying a Bermuda headed or leg-o'mutton sail, notably Matthew Turner's own schooner *Consuelo*, and *Pearl*, another product of his yard. It was really the success of Turner's schooner *Chispa*, however, that gave it acceptance.

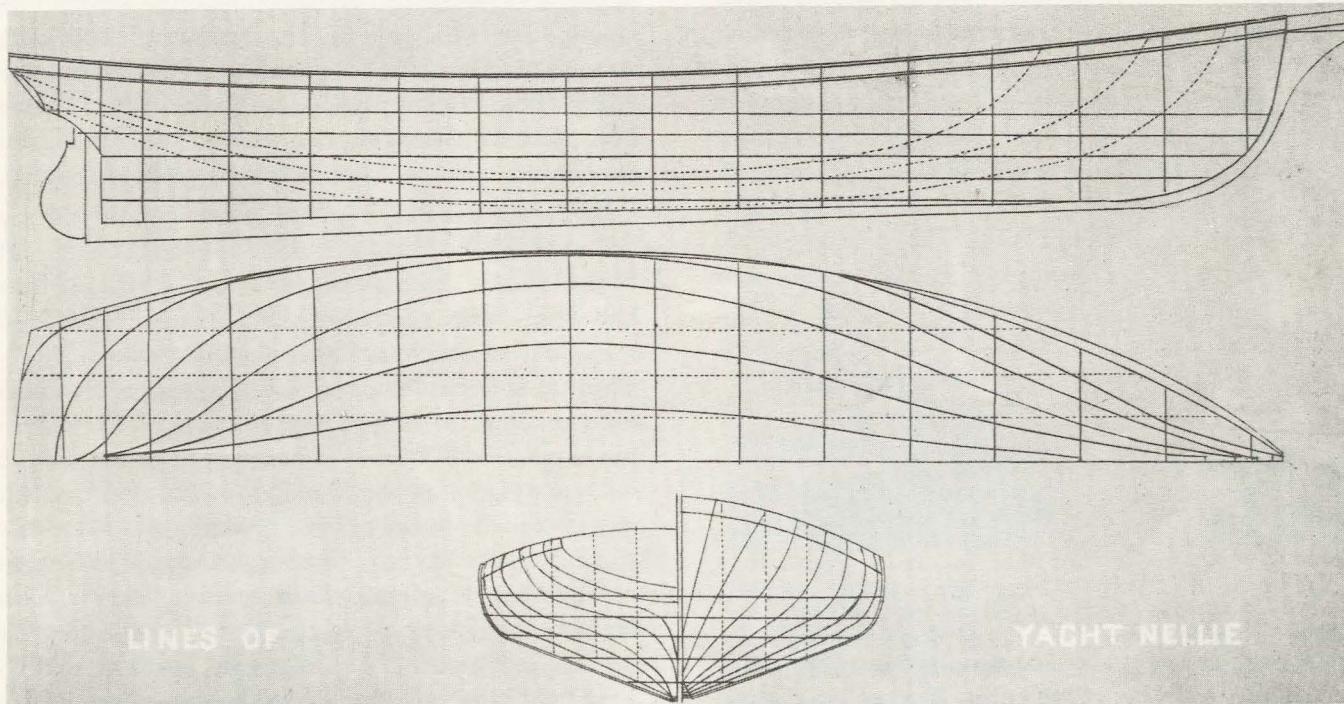
*Chispa* was built in 1879 for the gregarious Isidor Gutte, later to serve ten terms of office as Commodore of the San Francisco Yacht Club. *Chispa*



(above) *Chispa* beating up the City front. A good look at a classic Turner schooner yacht with leg o'mutton main. *Chispa* was fast, but she was also the scene of many a good party under the ownership of Isidor Gutte. Her signal cannon is in the collection of the San Francisco Maritime Museum.

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(below) *Nellie's* lines as printed in the *Olympian*. Notice the placement of maximum beam on *Nellie*. One of Matthew Turner's major contributions to the design of west coast commercial sailing craft was in abandoning the rule of placing the maximum beam  $2/5$ ths aft of the stem, instead, moving it amidships or just abaft of midships.





*Nellie* in a breeze. Two black lines across her jib attach the bonnets, which can be removed as the wind pipes up. These are vestigial reminders of the days of galleons and carracks when bonnets were used on main and fore courses.

was an immediate success and won her first regatta before she was even named. Her string of regatta wins, and the victory in a subsequent match race against *Annie*, added strong credibility to the efficiency of the leg o'mutton main. Although there is no evidence that the centerboarder *Chispa* carried outside ballast, Turner's schooner *Nellie*, built in 1880, was given a "lead plaster" keel as well as a leg o'mutton main. Her racing success was so decisive, that by 1882 a number of the older schooners were going into the yard to have outside ballast added, and the sailmakers were cutting leg o'mutton mains to be added to the sail inventory.

In *Nellie*, Matthew Turner modelled and built for owner Hyde Bowie a yacht which Turner hoped would take back the championship that his schooner *Consuelo* had lost to the schooner *Con O'Connor* in 1879 and had failed to regain in a rematch in 1880. *Nellie* was built for speed, but since her owner intended to cruise her outside the Bay (uncommon up to that time) she was also built to stand up to heavy weather. Turner gave her a

substantial keel in addition to her 16' x 8', 2300 lb., iron centerboard. In 1881, her first summer of racing, she challenged the reigning match race champion, *Con O'Connor*, and despite unexpectedly light air, she triumphed easily. An elated Bowie hoisted a 60 foot drover's whip to the truck and flew it thereafter to signify her status as champion.

Although formal regattas were conducted by both the Pacific and the San Francisco Yacht Clubs, match races pitting two of the fastest boats had come into vogue with the *Chispa/Annie* and the *Consuelo/Con O'Connor* challenge of 1879. Considerable public interest was generated by these matches, and to many they symbolized the championship of the Bay. It is possible to get an insight into the egos involved, and the esteem in which speed was held, when one realizes that after the *Annie* was beaten by *Chispa* she was sold within two weeks. *Consuelo*, owned at that time by John D. Spreckels, was given another chance, but after her second loss to *Con O'Connor* she was sold to the pearl fisheries in Baja, California. Frequently

more than egos were at stake, for in at least one of the *Consuelo* / *Con O'Conner* matches the owners had \$1000 side bets on the outcome.

It was in this setting that during the Spring of 1882 the new owners of the one-year-old schooner *Fleur de Lis* threw down the gauntlet to champion *Nellie*, a stake of \$2000 to be put up by each side. The newspapers quickly discovered the challenge and it was given extensive coverage. Few of San Francisco's 200,000 citizens owned yachts, but living in a great port city, bounded on three sides by water, informed daily on maritime events in their newspapers and owing their livelihood to maritime commerce, San Franciscans were attuned to the sea. With the combination of a good sporting challenge and a substantial sum of money riding on the outcome, it is little wonder that public interest ran high. To put in perspective the \$4000 stake, it is interesting to know that *Nellie* evidently cost her owner about \$4300, including 2 suits of sails. And *Nellie* was adjudged in contemporary newspaper accounts of her launching as the "handsomest and best equipped yacht on the Bay."

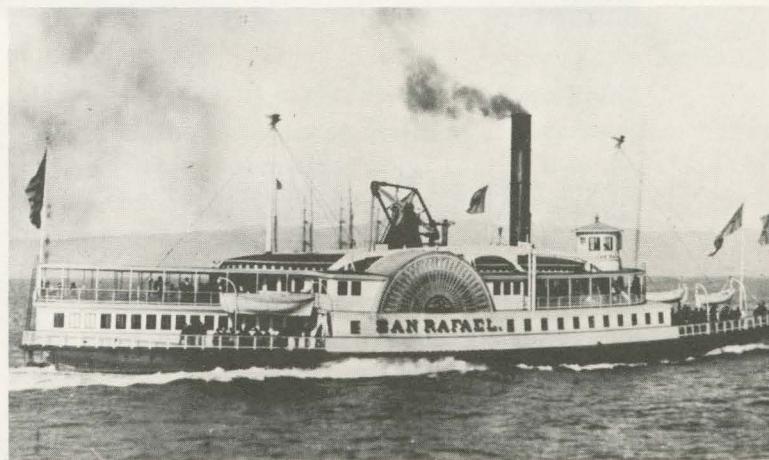
The two schooners were put in Stone's yard that spring. The 60 foot *Nellie* was recaulked, had a broken bowsprit repaired, her main boom shortened, and some 3 tons of ballast removed from inside and added to her keel. The new owners of the 63 foot *Fleur de Lis* ordered her thoroughly refitted. Her ballast of light slag, all carried inside, was removed and replaced with 7 tons of lead inside and a "lead plaster" keel of 5 tons. This new distribution of weight gave the owners enough confidence to lengthen her spars so she could carry more sail. The bottoms of both boats were carefully prepared; *Fleur de Lis'* with blacklead, and *Nellie's* with two coats of English Coach varnish topped off with a coat of "British Lustre."

By mutual agreement the race was to be held on Thursday, June 8, over a modified version of the old San Francisco Yacht Club race course, the racing rules of the Pacific Yacht Club to govern. The start was in Mission Bay on an imaginary line drawn between Mission Rock and Long Bridge. The course went to a stake boat off Hunter's Point and thence to another stake boat off Oakland Creek. The next leg took the yachts up the city front, leaving Alcatraz and Goat Island to starboard, to a stake boat in the lee of Fort Point.

Rounding the Fort Point stake boat the yachts retraced the course to the finish line in Mission Bay, this time leaving Alcatraz to the south. Handicaps were computed by the current measurement rule in force, or 45 seconds a foot of difference in water-line length. *Fleur de Lis*, about 3 feet longer than *Nellie*, gave her 2 minutes and 20 seconds.

To the knowledgeable, *Nellie* was the undisputed favorite, but enough doubt existed to fuel the fires of the journalists, and strong partisans of both camps existed among the public. True, *Nellie* was the reigning champion, but *Chispa* had been reported to have taken *Nellie's* measure in various brushes in both light and heavy weather. *Fleur de Lis* hadn't shown much the year before, but this year under the syndicate headed by Captain White, re-spurred and re-ballasted, she was a new boat capable of carrying a cloud of canvas. Newspapers duly reported that she had tangled with several of the pilot schooners and had walked away from them.

By race time thousands of interested spectators had gathered on points of vantage, from Long Bridge to Telegraph and Russian Hills, and from the Sea Wall to Meiggs Wharf and Harbor View. The ferry boats *Garden City* and *San Rafael* were chartered by the owners of the two yachts and packed with friends and acquaintances; for with the exception of Captain White, who was to sail *Fleur de Lis*, none of the owners planned to be on board their boats. A carnival atmosphere prevailed

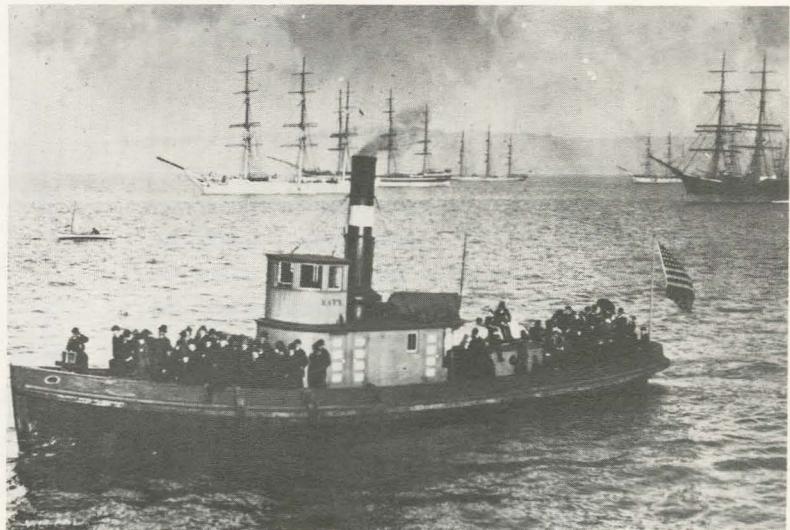


The *San Rafael* was one of the ferries chartered as spectator boats for the Great Challenge Race. Several years later she was sunk in a dense fog by the *Sausalito*, an incident which provided Jack London with the opening scene for *The Sea Wolf*.



(above) *Nellie* and *Fleur de Lis* race neck-and-neck down the City front on another, calmer, day. *Nellie*, with a gaff headed main, has just bent a water sail on her foresail boom. Note the triple sheeting to the three lowest bonnets on the jib.

(right) The tug *Katy* was frequently used as a committee boat in the 80's. Here she is in 1882 with full complement aboard. With everybody on the foredeck looking forward, *Katy* could well be taking the times across a starting or finishing line.



on the ferries. All manner of games of chance were set up, their operators paying a fee for the privilege. Betting pools were established, with odds running in favor of *Nellie* from 20-10 to 20-15. By the time the pools were closed, it was estimated that the total money involved ran between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

Race day had been preceded by several days of light breezes, but on the day before the usual westerlies had come in, and by mid-morning Thursday, the wind was already strong and continuing to strengthen. Race time at one o'clock found the wind at 30-32 knots.

The tug *Katy*, chartered for the occasion and

#### The "Fleur de Lis" Retires from a Contest with the "Nellie."

The Promise of an Exciting Race is Not Fulfilled—Yachtsmen Disgusted at the Actions of the Losing Vessel.

There was plenty of wind yesterday afternoon for the yacht race between the *Nellie* and *Fleur de Lis*. In fact there was too much wind for on the northwest all day, the bay was under short

#### THE YACHT RACE.

Struggle Between the Schooners *Nellie* and the *Fleur de Lis*.

A Breezy Day—Description of the Contest to Meiggs Wharf.

The Racing Machine Likely to be Very Badly Beaten.

The starting gun was fired along the line at 1 hr. crossed the line at 1 hr. 54 sec. *Fleur de Lis* had a double reefed foresail and jib with the whole foresail, single with bonnet off. Both all they could carry in

both yachts set their under's Point the *Nellie* there to the Oakland u. 45 sec., a total gain h her time allowance,

#### A WILTED LILY.

Inglorious Ending of Yesterday's Yacht Race.

#### THE USUAL AQUATIC PROCESSION.

The *Nellie* Shows the *Fleur-de-Lis* a Clean Pair of Heels and Returns Home Without Company.

The race between the schooner yacht *Nellie* and *Fleur de Lis* for a purse of \$2,000 and championship, was in progress as the Bell pepper this afternoon. The day is just as makes the heart of the yachtsman such an occasion—a stiff, blustery blowing from the northeast, raising white-caps on the bay, and putting seamanship at the test. For very unusually mild weather has put winds scarcely ruffling the face. Yesterday a change took place. There was every appearance of bright to-day. This morning the wind disappointed, for at an early hour, which had fairly set in from the westward, had strengthened, so that when the two yachts had as many stand, carrying all they could stagger under. Being sailed for all they were will be no shortening sail as the cocky does not now over the cockpit. In order to feature about the return of the San Francisco Bay Stakeboat will be at Goat Island of other words, the yachts of these islands in return from the water front. The two vessels will come from the water front.

The start was made p starting point of the o

No yacht race in San Francisco has excited more interest than that between the *Nellie*, owned by Hyde R. Bowie, and *Fleur-de-Lis*, owned by Henry White, which took place yesterday afternoon. The steamers Garden City and San Rafael had been chartered to follow the yachts, and were liberally patronized. The rush of spectators on board the San Rafael, which lay at Saucelito ferry slips, was, at one time, so great that a number of persons, more careful of their comforts than enthusiastic about aquatic sport, declined to take passage. To the movement of departure, nevertheless, the stream of passengers continued strong, and at 12:45 o'clock, when the lines were cast off, the decks of the San Rafael were black with people and the roof crowded. Pool-selling was lively. The *Nellie* remained the favorite, but the odds diminished at one time until the rate was 20 to 15. The backers of Mr. White's craft lost heart, however, as the critical hour approached, and when the pool-seller desisted to watch the national arrival of the *Nellie*.

frequently a committee boat for Bay races, took the times across the line. *Fleur de Lis* started first, with *Nellie* crossing almost four minutes later. Under the rules in force a yacht could start at any time from the starting gun to a gun fired ten minutes later, her official start being timed from the moment she crossed the line.

From Mission Bay to Hunter's Point stake boat, *Nellie* slowly gained. On the next leg, just after rounding, *Fleur de Lis* suffered a vicious knockdown which laid her over on her beam ends and then rounded her up. She reduced sail, and again *Nellie* inexorably gained. Rounding the Oakland stake boat *Fleur de Lis* held only a 200 yard advantage. Perhaps remembering the knockdown, Captain White brought her head to wind and dropped his foresail, continuing on under jib and reefed main.

When *Nellie* rounded she carried a main, foresail and jib without bonnet, and Captain Matthew Turner took over the helm for the beat to Fort Point. Turner, with years of experience as a deep-water skipper, was considered one of the finest helmsmen on the Bay. At this point *Fleur de Lis* made the move that cost her any chance of winning. White elected to tack to starboard and stand across a strong flood tide to the city front. *Nellie*, whose captain had specifically demanded a flood tide race, continued on starboard tack to Goat Island before going over to starboard. *Fleur de Lis* in the middle of the stream, took a series of tacks, and when *Nellie* crossed her bow she was a quarter of a mile behind.

It took *Nellie* 18 tacks to get to Fort Point, hugging the shore as close as Matthew Turner dared take her. White repeatedly stood too far into the tide and on each tack *Fleur de Lis* lost ground. By the time *Nellie* had rounded the weather stake boat, *Fleur de Lis* was not much past Meiggs Wharf, and as *Nellie* approached Alcatraz on the down wind slide, White, then at Anita Rock, put up the helm and *Fleur de Lis* headed for home. *Nellie* continued around the course, and when she reached Hunter's Point, found that the unusually heavy winds had driven the stake boat a quarter of a mile off station. Ironically, had *Fleur de Lis* continued, she could have successfully protested the race, for a dragging stake boat was cause for abandoning the race under the rules then in force.

RMG

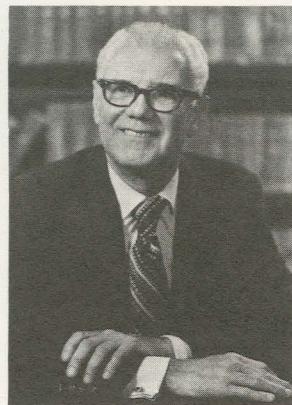
## NEW EXHIBIT BAYS FOR MUSEUM'S SECOND FLOOR

On March 22 work started on the creation of two second floor bays in the first step of a complete renovation of the Museum's Gold Rush and Cape Horner exhibit. The two bays will be dedicated to the memory of trustee R. Stanley Dollar, Jr., founding member of the Board and its past president from 1957 to 1959. Funding has been provided by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and matched by the generous gifts of The Zellerbach Family Fund, The Harold and Doris Zellerbach Fund, and trustee and past president Jack R. Dant.

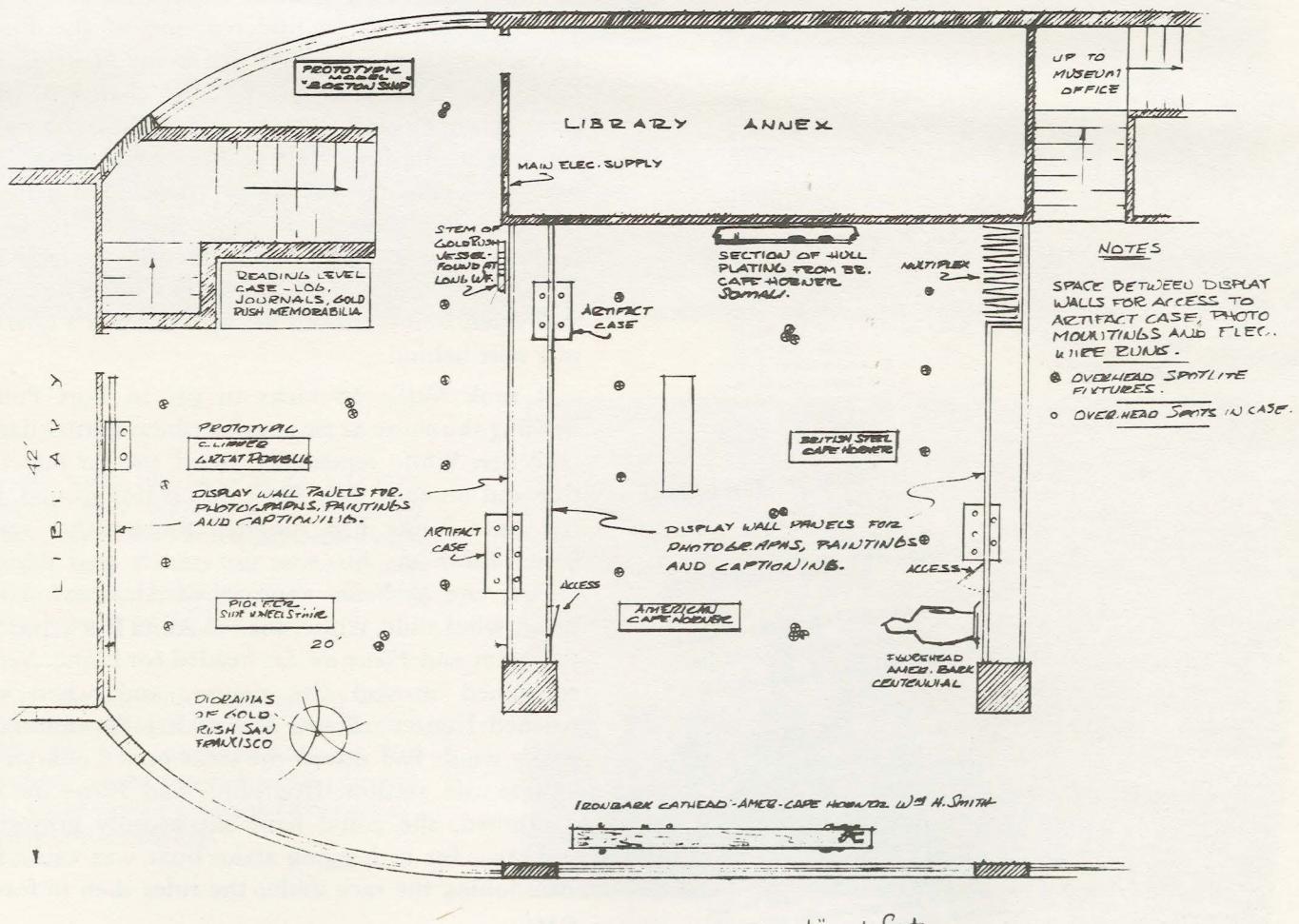
Designed by Director Karl Kortum, the new display will employ photographs, paintings and models to tell the story of the first and second wave of

sailing ships that dominated the Bay scene in the last century. The first fleet brought men seeking California's Gold, and the second seeking her grain.

To place the visitor in scale with the past, the Gold Rush bay will utilize the recently discovered stem timbers of a ship found at the site of Long Wharf during excavation for Embarcadero Center. In the Cape Horner bay the same sense of the past will be achieved by the figurehead of the Down Easter *Centennial*, built 100 years ago, the steering gear of the ship *Blairmore*, and part of the hull plating of the four masted bark *Somali*. Opening of the new galleries is tentatively planned for July, at which time a dedication ceremony will be held.



R. Stanley Dollar, Jr., past president of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Association, 1957-59, who passed away November 7, 1975.



## PAMPANITO

The fleet of the San Francisco Maritime Museum will shortly receive a major addition through the gift from the U. S. Navy of the Fleet Submarine PAMPANITO, USS 383. Although actual transfer will probably not take place until May, both the Navy and Congress have approved the gift.

PAMPANITO was built in 1943 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and after commissioning in November of that year, she transited the Panama Canal and arrived in Pearl Harbor in February of 1944. She made six wartime patrols, mostly in the Gulf of Siam and the South China Sea. During her tour of duty in the Pacific she was credited with sinking five Japanese vessels totaling 27,332 tons.

On her third patrol, in a dramatic rescue, she picked up 73 British and Australian prisoners of war who were left floating on makeshift rafts when

their transport was sunk. PAMPANITO then headed for Saipan with 153 men aboard instead of her normal complement of 80.

Plans are now being drawn up by Director Karl Kortum, Curator Harlan Soeten and Ship Committee Chairman Robert Blake for alterations necessary to put PAMPANITO on display as a memorial to the Submarine Service and especially to the men who served on her during World War II. After she is ready to receive visitors, PAMPANITO will be permanently berthed at Pier 45 at Fisherman's Wharf.

After the war, PAMPANITO was decommissioned and placed in the reserve fleet. In 1960 she was recommissioned and assigned to the Naval Reserve Training Unit at Mare Island. She was active in this role until 1971, when she was once again decommissioned.



U.S. Navy photograph

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR READING LOGS AND JOURNALS

Volunteers are needed to read original logs and journals as the first step in cataloguing the Museum's collection of this invaluable source material. Much of our collection consists of logs and journals from the Alaska Packer "Star" ships. In addition there

is material from such varied voyages as those of whalers, early steamers and Cape Horners. Anyone interested in providing valued assistance to the Museum, while having the enjoyment of reliving sea journeys of a bygone era — please contact librarian David Hull.

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The San Francisco Maritime Museum Association would like to thank the following members and friends whose generous support has made it possible to carry on the work of the Museum over the past year.

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